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SUBJECT: GEORGIA: IRI FOCUS GROUPS - ROSNER POLL INDICATE
SAKASHVILI STABLE

Classified By: AMBASSADOR JOHN F. TEFFT. REASONS: 1.4 (B) AND (D).

11. (C) Summary: Recent IRI focus groups along with a United National Movement (UNM) poll indicate that President Saakashvili enjoys solid support and a large majority view that it is likely he will serve out his presidential term which ends in 2013. According to the August 8-12 UNM poll conducted by Greenberg, Quinlan and Rosner, the Christian Democratic Movement (CDM), and the Irakli Alasania-led Alliance for Georgia are the second and third most popular parties respectively. The poll also indicated that the Georgian public appear more upbeat. Anecdotal evidence from International Republican Institute (IRI) focus groups, as well as the UNM polling data indicated that the April to June protests are largely viewed as being pointless and counterproductive. End Summary.

12. (C) Comment: The results offered nothing terribly surprising but further supported growing conventional wisdom that only thing achieved by the protests was a drop in popularity for those who participated, and a bump for the UNM and GoG. The polling data and focus groups showed a lack of support for Saakashvili's resignation and indicated that autumn protests to push for a resignation would not have popular support. Finally, Alasania's general inability to garner much interest in the focus groups coupled with his fairly modest polling numbers show that while Alasania made an immediate splash, he has significant political legwork ahead of him if he is going turn his party (Our Georgia - Free Democrats) into a consolidated, effective political movement. End Comment.

Focus Groups Consistent That Protests Failed, Misha to Serve Out Term

13. (C) IRI conducted four focus groups made up of eight Tbilisi residents each on August 10 and 11. The individuals were not party members and were self-identified as one pro-GoG group, two neutral groups, and one anti-GoG (or pro-opposition) group. All the groups agreed that the protests failed to accomplish anything. Most viewed the aftermath as a political victory for the GoG with pro and neutral groups generally praising the GoG's handling of the protests. The pro and neutral groups viewed the placing of cells on roads and radical actions as mistakes. Many participants described the cells as ridiculous, stupid, and worse. All the groups felt like the non-parliamentary opposition had no plan, no vision and was wholly ineffective. The anti-GoG group was the most harsh in its criticism of the non-parliamentary opposition who described leaders as "feckless", "phony", and "just as bad as Misha". One participant said that "if you are serious about your cause, you don't take vacations or days off" which received widespread agreement from the rest of the anti group.

14. (C) All the groups considered it highly likely that Saakashvili would serve out his term with most expressing a belief that there were not many credible challengers or much public support for his removal. Even many of the pro-opposition echo these ideas. Nonetheless, even the

pro-GoG group agreed that the government needed to follow through on the promised concrete reforms. All groups liked the idea of the direct Tbilisi mayoral elections but stressed the need for real budgetary and other authority to be given to the mayor, otherwise the participants deemed the initiative a stunt. All groups feared that upcoming by-elections could bring more political turmoil and were hopeful that elections would not cause further polarization. Qhopeful that elections would not cause further polarization. Irakli Alasania was barely mentioned when the groups discussed politicians who they saw as a potential mayor or political counterweight to Saakashvili. In contrast, every group had positive things to say about Giorgi Targamadze (CDM) with many saying they liked what they have seen but want to see more.

Rosner Poll - Four Factors Dictate Upswing In UNM Numbers

15. (C) According to pollster Jeremy Rosner (of Greenberg, Quinlan, and Rosner, who regularly conducts polls for UNM) four factors have influenced a positive upswing in UNM numbers. The first is a perception of a more stable security situation in large part due to President Obama's message about Georgia at the Moscow summit; VP Biden's visit to Georgia; and a general lower perception of threat of war. (Embassy Note: Regarding President Obama's visit to Moscow, 78 percent of Georgians said they paid close attention to the visit with 78 percent viewing his visit as positive versus 5 percent negative. Numbers on VP Biden's visit are almost identical with 76 percent saying they paid close attention to the visit with 76 percent viewing his visit as positive and 6 percent as negative. End Note.) Rosner said he believed President Obama's clear message from Moscow on Georgia's

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territorial integrity reassured Georgians which in part translated into better numbers for the incumbent UNM.

16. (C) The second major factor was a sense of relief at the end of the protests. The poll showed that only 27 percent approved of the protests while 59 percent disapproved. Despite generally higher opposition support in Tbilisi, the numbers in the capital were similar with 35 percent approval, and 50 disapproval. The GoG's handling of the protests also seem to be perceived positively. Those polled viewed individuals and institutions involved in the GoG's handling of the protests more favorably as a result - President Saakashvili (51 more favorably as a result of the protests versus 32 less); Police (49 more 36 less); MoIA (44 more 37 less); GoG (43 more 36 less); Tbilisi Mayor Gigi Ugalava (41 more 32 less). According to Rosner, the third major factor was that the public viewed the handling of the anniversary of the war in a positive way, which likely lead to patriotic feelings influencing the numbers. The fourth factor Rosner mentioned was the positive reaction to President Saakashvili's parliamentary speech outlining further political and democratic reforms. This speech was viewed positively by 42 percent, while only 16 percent viewed it negatively.

Misha's Numbers Solid

17. (C) Saakashvili's job performance numbers improved to 68 percent approval/30 percent disapproval from 65/32 when polled in early May. When asked generically whether Georgia should continue on the current course set by Saakashvili versus pursuing a different course 51 percent said current course versus 43 percent who preferred a different direction. May polling numbers for the same question were 47 percent current course/49 percent different course. When asked if Saakashvili will finish his presidential term, 71 percent said yes with 63 percent believing strongly that he will serve out his term. 13 percent believed he would not serve out his term, while only 8 percent felt strongly that he would not complete his current term.

Now Here's the Party Numbers

18. (C) Rosner used three models when looking at party numbers: raw, likely voters, and allocated (which extrapolates the results to predict parliamentary election results if held today). The raw numbers showed UNM at 35 percent (28 in May); CDM at 9 percent (12 in May); Alliance for Georgia at 9 percent (12 in May); Labor at 7 percent (9 in May); National Forum at 4 percent (5 in May); and the United Opposition (including Gachechiladze, Burjanadze, Zourabichvili etc.) at 4 percent (9 in May). The likely voter model followed a similar pattern showing UNM at 41 percent (32 in May); CDM at 13 percent (15 in May); Alliance for Georgia at 10 percent (14 in May); Labor at 6 percent (9 in May); National Forum at 4 percent (5 in May); and United Opposition at 4 percent (8 in May). The allocated voter model showed UNM would win 47 percent (37 in May); CDM winning 15 percent (16 in May); Alliance for Georgia winning 11 percent (16 in May); Labor winning 7 percent (9 in May); National Forum winning 6 percent (5 in May); and United Opposition winning 5 percent (9 in May).
TEFFT